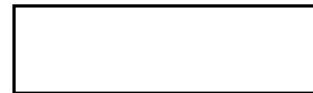


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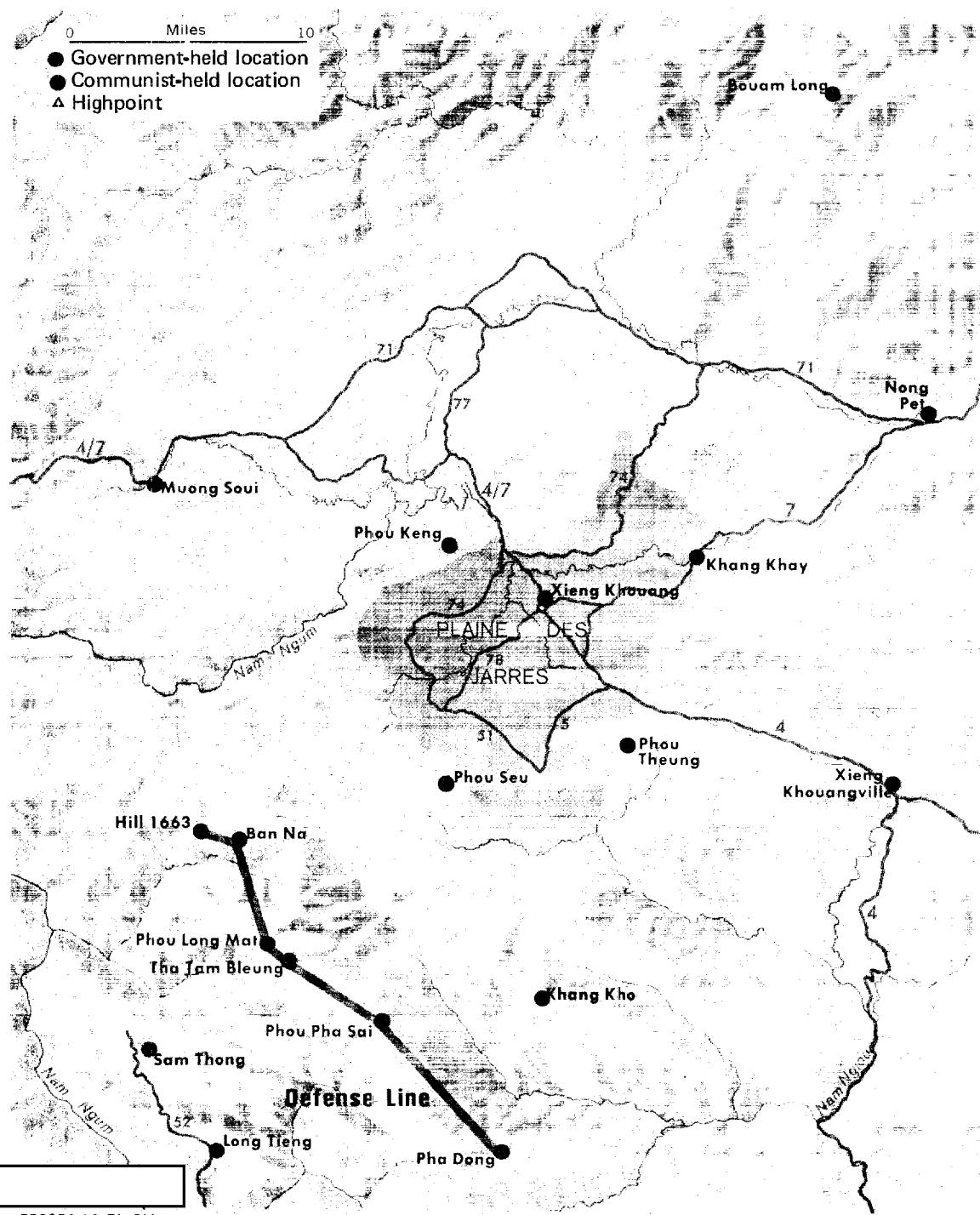
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LAOS: PLAINE DES JARRES AREA



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LAOS: The situation in the Long Tieng area has deteriorated as the morale of irregular troops falters.

About 800 troops abandoned the base at Ban Na without a fight on 25 December; some of the irregular units suffered moderate casualties as they filtered southward toward the Phou Long Mat - Tha Tam Bleung area, while others moved unopposed toward Sam Thong. The abandonment of Ban Na, which was to be the northern anchor of the Ban Na - Pha Dong defensive line, indicates that Vang Pao is in jeopardy of losing control over the Meo forces, routed from the Plaine des Jarres last week, that he has been trying to regroup to defend Long Tieng. The apparent collapse of the Meo morale may have been precipitated by the flight of almost 30,000 Meo dependents from the Long Tieng Valley several days ago.

Because Ban Na commands infiltration routes into the Sam Thong and Long Tieng areas, it has figured prominently in the Communists' last two campaigns. If the Communists are able to move into Ban Na in strength before the irregulars reoccupy the abandoned positions, they will have gained a major tactical advantage at little cost.

The battle for Long Tieng is once again shaping up as a test between the government's efforts to reconstitute and reinforce its fighting force and the Communists' ability to move troops and supplies quickly into the rugged terrain west of the Plaine. On the government side, Vang Pao's force has been increased by 3,000 irregulars, including 1,200 recently arriving from Savannakhet, since the Communists kicked off their offensive.

For their part, the Communists have not yet swung into heavy action since taking the Plaine a week ago. The 866th Regiment is the only regimental force that has been positively identified south or west of the Plaine. But increasing numbers of small]

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enemy units are appearing in the valleys between Long Tieng and the Plaine, and the Communists appear to have pressured the irregulars out of Khang Kho this weekend. Khang Kho is located due south of the Plaine.

North of the Plaine, preparations are under way for the possible airlift of as many as 10,000 Meo refugees from the Bouam Long area. If the refugees leave, the odds are good that the 900 troops presently defending Bouam Long will capitulate quickly should the Communists move against the base. Bouam Long's tactical importance is minimal as long as the Communists are directly threatening Long Tieng, but the base has been used in the past to launch attacks against the Communists' lines of communication.

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INDIA - BANGLA DESH: There is some confusion between Dacca and New Delhi about the handling of "war criminals."

On 24 December, Bangla Desh radio announced the arrest of 30 East Pakistan government officials--including the governor--and asserted that they would be tried for genocide. Both New Delhi and Indian officers in Dacca, however, later denied that the prisoners had been handed over to the Bengalis. A Bangla Desh official subsequently said that Dacca had requested that the prisoners be surrendered but had not received a reply.

Indian Foreign Minister Swaran Singh has told reporters that, because of India's obligations, New Delhi may not be able to withdraw its troops from Bangla Desh "for some time." According to the press, a high-ranking Defense Ministry official estimated that the occupation would last three or four months.

In addition to establishing law and order, the Indians may want to ensure the repatriation of nearly 10 million Bengalis who fled to India. Although the repatriation is not scheduled to begin until 1 January, the Indians estimate that 250,000 people have already returned home.

So far, Bangla Desh has received formal recognition only from India and Bhutan. London and Canberra are approaching the question cautiously, but the British believe that an "inordinate delay" will play into Soviet hands. Both governments, however, are likely to delay recognition until convinced that the Bangla Desh Government is in fact able to establish control and until Indian troops are withdrawn.

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In the meantime, Peking has closed its mission in Dacca because of the "occupation of East Pakistan by Indian armed forces."

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PAKISTAN: The majority of the ten-man cabinet announced on 24 December is drawn from the left wing of President Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Bhutto will hold the most important portfolios himself, and several ministers--although somewhat to the left of the President--may well have been chosen because of their personal loyalty to him rather than because of their ideology.

Mohammad Rashid, the party's leading radical and Bhutto's main rival within the PPP, will head the Social Welfare Ministry, but this may well be one area in which Bhutto had planned a somewhat radical program in any case. Bhutto may have wanted to remove Rashid from the running for chief minister of the Punjab--Pakistan's most populous province. For this position Bhutto favors a relatively conservative politician who has consistently supported the President. [redacted]

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ARAB CONFEDERATION: The alliance of Egypt, Syria, and Libya has acquired more trappings, but meaningful unity remains distant.

Meetings of the chiefs of state of the Confederation of Arab Republics in Cairo last week resulted in the naming of a confederal prime minister and cabinet and the establishment of a number of bodies designed to strengthen economic and political ties among the three countries. President Sadat previously had been named chief of state of the confederation. At this meeting a Syrian was selected to head the cabinet, and a confederal parliamentary body was scheduled to convene in March.

Although the confederation provides a show of Arab unity, it has exhibited few signs of becoming a truly effective political unit. Cooperative steps taken so far have been minor and are likely to remain so for the near future at least. At last week's session, there were no outward signs of the wrangling that reportedly marked the October gathering of the three heads of state, but mutual suspicions and divergent policies will continue to impair progress toward unity.

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ITALY: The election of moderate Christian Democrat Giovanni Leone as President of the republic was a compromise devised when neither the candidate of the right nor of the left could win a majority.

Leone comes the closest of all the presidential contenders to the type of man envisaged for the post by the drafters of the constitution. He will be a moderator among the parties and will not attempt to tinker with the present constitution in order to extend presidential powers.

The most significant aspect of the election is the fact that the Christian Democrats again captured the prestigious post for one of their own. The party did so by an unusual show of unity and discipline. It provided over 90 percent of its potential vote through 18 ballots for its first choice, Amintore Fanfani, and maintained sufficient discipline on the final ballot to put over its compromise candidate.

There is some speculation in Rome that when, as is the custom, Premier Emilio Colombo presents his resignation to the new President this week, Leone will accept it and a government crisis will ensue. There is no evidence as yet, however, that the four parties of the center-left, which must give Leone the go-ahead, have reached a decision on the Colombo government's future.

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